

Petitioning

The simple act of adding your name, along with others, to an official appeal asserts your political identity and rights. While petitioning has been open for everyone, it was especially important for those barred from voting. In the early Republic, mass petitioning provided poor white men, women, free blacks, and other minorities a means to voice grievances and to claim a role in determining the direction of the country.

Petitioning has maintained a role in the democratic process. Whether they are traditional paper forms or electronic mailings, petitions continue to offer a means for individuals to shape political discourse.

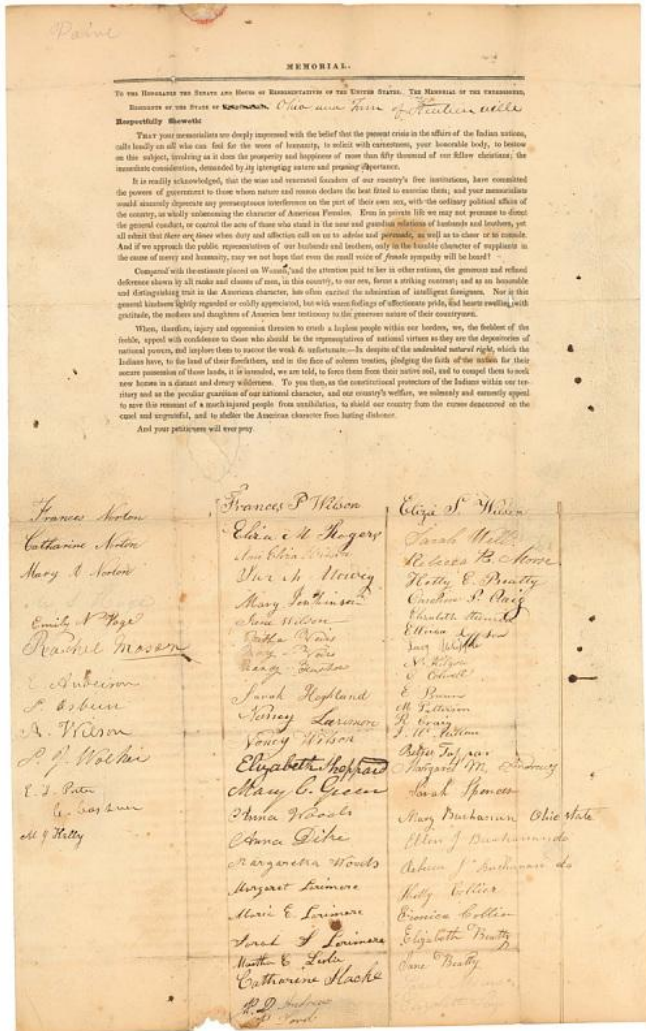


Petitions

A small sampling of petitions from the 19th and early 20th century presented to Congress
Courtesy of National Archives Foundation

Petitions to Congress

The first nationally organized petitioning drive was a protest against the federal government removing Cherokee Indians from their eastern native lands. Since then petition drives have focused on topics as diverse as can be imagined.



Memorial from the ladies of Steubenville, Ohio, protesting Indian removal, February 15, 1830
Loan from National Archives and Records Administration

To the Honorable the Congress of the United States:

The Undersigned Inhabitants of the Town of ^{East Haddam} East Haddam in the County of Middlesex,
and State of Connecticut, respectfully represent:—

THAT, in their view, the due observance of the Sabbath is essential to the permanent prosperity of these United States. From a conviction, founded on the Word of Inspiration, and verified by the Records of profane history, that temporal calamities are surely awarded, sooner or later, by the just judgment of Heaven, to nations as well as individuals, who violate the sanctity of the day consecrated by God to his peculiar service;—your Memorialists beg leave to unite with their fellow-citizens in renewing the application, which was extensively but unsuccessfully made, at the last session of Congress, for a Law prohibiting the transportation of the Mail on the Sabbath. This labor, which is countenanced by public authority, and supported by statesmen, who profess to be patriots and philanthropists, can be defended by no plea but that of necessity. But is it not true, that the same argument of necessity may be urged by the merchant, who wishes to buy and sell; the farmer, who chooses to plow, sow, or reap; and the manufacturer, who loves to see his machinery and workmen actively and profitably employed on the Sabbath? Every individual in the community may readily find important, and, in his estimation, indispensable business, or amusement, which demands and deserves his attention on this sacred day. Your Memorialists do not plead for the observance of an institution merely human; but for one of divine original, which has done more, and will continue to do more than any other for the suppression of vice and the prevention of anarchy and misrule; and, with these impressions, they entreat that their Memorial and those, which shall be presented on the same subject by their fellow-citizens in different parts of the country, may not be dismissed with a bare expression of respectful consideration, but may produce a Law in its provisions and sanctions corresponding, in some measure, to the rule of obedience, which is due from the legislators of a Christian Nation to that Almighty Being, who has commanded all men to remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Subscribers

Subscribers.

Isaac Parsons	Daniel S. Chapman	Daniel Chapman
Saml. Chapman	Ephraim Muck	Nathaniel Chapman
Jeremiah Hutchins	William Burke	Wilson Taylor
Orat. Bl Chapman	Fremont Fuller	Christo. C. Gates
Josiah Chapman	Jonah Gates	Leander H. Gorham
Uri Gates	Elijah N. Bingham	Gordon Fuller
Robert W. Chapman	Elijah W. Bingham	Chas. E. Hart
Richard Warner	Nath. S. Holmes	Isaac A. Berin
William Stillman	John W. Hittles	Lewis Brainerd
Asahel Pratt	Thomas Abbey, 2d	Sylvester Gates
Abner H. Stannard	Isaac C. Nickley	Joshua B. Emmons
John Percival	Jedediah Hall	
Lizzy Swan	Horace Ransom	
William Brainerd	Samuel Gates	
Walley Fuller	Gordon A. Howler	

Continuing the Tradition

Petition from citizens of East Haddam, Middlesex County, Connecticut, against Sunday mail, January 18, 1830

Loan from National Archives and Records Administration

West Union Iowa, Jan 19th 1886
 Hon. Wm E Fuller M. C.
 Washington, D. C.
 DEAR SIR: I Respectfully request that you use your personal influence for the enactment of a law by Congress requiring all imitations of Butter and Cheese that are not the product of unadulterated milk or cream, manufactured or sold in the United States, to be labelled with a U. S. stamp.
 Yours Respectfully,
 Union Creamery Co

Secora Iowa, 7/8 1886
 Hon. Wm E Fuller M. C.
 Washington, D. C.
 DEAR SIR: I respectfully request that you use your personal influence for the enactment of a law by Congress requiring ALL imitations of Butter and Cheese, manufactured or sold in the United States, or used on the table of public eating houses, to be labelled with a U. S. stamp.
 Yours Respectfully,
 Geo Q Gardner

Sanairillo Iowa, Feb 13 1886
 Hon. W E Fuller M. C.
 Washington, D. C.
 DEAR SIR: I respectfully request that you use your personal influence for the enactment of a law by Congress requiring ALL imitations of Butter and Cheese, manufactured or sold in the United States, or used on the table of public eating houses, to be labelled with a U. S. stamp.
 Yours Respectfully,
 L M Kennedy

Strawberry Point Iowa, Jan 29 1886
 Hon. Wm Fuller M. C.
 Washington, D. C.
 DEAR SIR: I respectfully request that you use your personal influence for the enactment of a law by Congress requiring ALL imitations of Butter and Cheese, manufactured or sold in the United States, or used on the table of public eating houses, to be labelled with a U. S. stamp.
 Yours Respectfully,
 Char. F. Chapman

Postcards sent to Congressman William Fuller requesting support for the labeling of imitation butter and cheese, 1886
 Loan from National Archives and Records Administration



Petitioning Congress

Congress receiving petition for reduction of federal tax on earned income, December 1929

Courtesy of Library of Congress



Environmental organizations delivering written petitions to Congress opposing the Keystone Pipeline, February 14, 2012
Courtesy of 350.org

Hours & Admission

Open every day, except December 25, from 10:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Admission is free and no tickets are required.

Location & Contact

1300 Constitution Ave NW,
Washington, DC 20560 <<https://www.google.com/maps/place/smithsonian+national+museum+of+american+history/@38.8912835,-77.0322449,17z>>
Contact Information </about/contact>

Our mission is to empower people to create a just and compassionate future by exploring, preserving, and sharing the complexity of our past.

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